BRIGHTON AND HOVE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY 27th NOVEMBER 2025 AT THE COMMUNITY BASE, QUEEN'S ROAD, BRIGHTON

Attendees: Owen Sharp, Caroline Ellis, Simon Jardine, Ashley Ridley, Marjorie Leeds, James May, Andrew Woolmer, Toby Keynes, Claire Fergusson-O'Toole, Trevor Freeman, Hyder Khalil, Ben Thomas, Peter Denyer, Josh Woolcott, Nigel Fox, Caroline Brown, Richard James, Al Emery, Kim Leyland-Walker, Ken Rist, Duncan Hill, Ian Newman, Beatrice Bass, Andrew England, Alisa Hnydiuk, Jasmine Wanstall, Kevin West

Apologies for absence were received from Stewart Stone, Paul Chandler, Frances Lindsay-Hills, Robert Brown, David Sears, Iain King.

The Chair, Simon Jardine, welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Minutes of the AGM on 7th November 2024

These were formally adopted.

Chair's Report

We were expecting a quiet year in 2025, but it was much busier than expected with by-elections in both Westbourne & Poets Corner and Queen's Park. There were also a number of Sussex by-elections that some members were involved with and in Sussex it is shaping up to be a battle between Lib Dems and Reform. Of 17 Sussex by-elections 11 have been won by the Lib Dems, which supports our message that it's a battle between Lib Dems and Reform in Sussex and it's a similar picture across the South East.

In Westbourne in May our candidate, Michael Wang, achieved 3rd place with 22% of the vote, which was a huge advance in vote share. Queen's Park, in September, proved a more difficult campaign as it's strong Labour/Green territory. The Greens put forward a strong campaign to win the seat. Our candidate, Rudi Dikty-Daudiyan, proved himself to be a tremendous candidate but in the end he came 4th, with 4% of the vote, because of the strong Green campaign. The Chair wanted to offer a big thank you to everyone who helped.

The Sussex Mayor campaign, with Ben Dempsey as our candidate, was launched in August in Queen's Park and we are already campaigning hard with the first leaflet delivered across key target wards in the city. Special thanks this year went to Nigel Fox, who was our top leaflet deliverer and to Josh Woolcott, our top canvasser.

The key lessons learned this year was that we work best in elections and we can target elections and work together. The aim is to harness the energy found in by-elections and to make this "business as normal."

Our key actions now are to develop a strong campaigns team and to prepare for the local elections in 2027. We want to have at least one paper candidate in every ward and the Chair asked members of the audience to consider taking on this role. There are 54 council seats available in 23 wards. We have 2 candidates in place in our target ward of Kemptown – Robert Brown and Stewart Stone. We need a second candidate in Westbourne and we are still to choose a target ward in Pavilion.

The Chair reminded us of the Christmas party in the Lion and Lobster on 18th December, with a few tickets still available.

Treasurer's Report

Owen Sharp presented the 2024 and 2025 Local Party Accounts (see attached). He reported that membership fees this year from Lib Dem HQ were £462.70 and our donations were £3,001.50, so this is clearly the key income and donations were higher than last year, although we would always welcome more. It's possible to make a regular donation, which really helps, and Owen can arrange this for you easily. Fundraising raised £605.00.

To be ready to fight by-elections, and needing to contribute to the mayoral election, it is still essential to raise as many funds as possible.

Andrew Harrison, the Independent Auditor, has agreed the accounts and the accounts were accepted, with Andrew being re-appointed as Auditor.

Election of Officers and Ordinary Members of the Executive Committee

The Chair introduced Kevin West, the Lewes campaigns chair and town councillor, who had kindly agreed to be our Returning Officer. Kevin told us how much he loved Brighton and Hove Lib Dems, and welcomed our contribution to the general and local elections in the Lewes constituency. Each nominee introduced themselves to the meeting and said something about their past experience.

The following people were elected or re-elected to the committee and there were no roles contested (see attached document).

The Chair welcomed Ben Dempsey, our elected Lib Dem candidate for the forthcoming Sussex Mayor elections.

Key Points from Ben Dempsey's Talk

Ben grew up in Haywards Heath and attended Haywards Heath 6th Form College. In 1997 he was very proud to have won a mock election there and so he was delighted when Alison Bennett won the Mid Sussex parliamentary election in 2024. He went to Oxford University and then worked in TV before moving to the NGO sector working in humanitarian and development roles. He worked for Save the Children and a US corporation, working on policy and advocacy. He achieved a PhD in social science nature conservation at Sussex University. He now works for the World Wildlife Fund on nature conservation. He lives in Ditchling and is married with 3 daughters. He's a keen supporter of Brighton and Hove Albion!

The Mayor is a powerful role with powers and money for economic development and the ability to form a growth strategy in housing, planning, policing and crime, transport, the environment and net zero. The role is designed for a longer-term view and funding reflects that.

He feels there is real fear in our communities and there is a danger of exploiting those anxieties with division. He spoke about the experience of the Crowborough barracks plan and the abuse that has been experienced by asylum seekers from right wing forces. Our Lib Dem values of tolerance and kindness are those that most people believe in and we need to show them there is an alternative.

If we win, we can show people that Sussex is a Lib Dem place with more MPs and councillors in Brighton and Hove. Practical policies are needed for us to have future success. Sussex is an incredible place with its brilliant environment and slightly quirky culture. We have excellent universities, and we must ensure that businesses stay here. In relation to transport, we can't get around easily and need to have better infrastructure with an investment in buses, as well as rail, cycling and walking connectivity.

People and nature are not separate from the environment, and we need to work out how we enhance our communities so that everyone has access to green space. We need more housing, including low cost and social housing.

There is a core mayoral committee, with Tim Murray as electoral agent. We need to approach the mayoral elections as one, and not as separate local parties. We need to identify our target areas and give the strong message that it is only the Lib Dems who can stop Reform and the Conservatives.

Ben then answered questions from the floor and the Chair presented Ben with a bottle of wine.

A personal thank you to Simon Jardine for his hard work was made by a member of the audience.